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# The Yellow Claw

By SAX ROHMER

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## PROLOGUE.

In this unusually entertaining mystery story the author, cleverly combining the workmanship of Conan Doyle with the imagination of Poe, weaves a plot that does not vex the reader, but whets his appetite. Adventure lurks on every page. It is a tale of weird characters and weird environments—of crime that burrows stealthily beneath the city and yet creeps into the highest places. Mr. Rohmer, an enthusiastic student of obscure oriental cults, heightens the adroit surprises and dramatic turns of his speeding story with master touches of uncanny atmosphere that will fascinate and astonish the most jaded reader of mysteries.

## CHAPTER I.

### The Lady of the Givet Furs.

HENRY LEROUX wrote busily on. The light of the table lamp, softened and enriched by its mosaic shade, gave an appearance of added opulence to the already handsome appointments of the room. The little table clock ticked merrily from half past 11 to a quarter to 12.

Into the cozy, bookish atmosphere of the novelist's study penetrated the muffled chime of Big Ben; it chimed the three-quarters. But, with his mind centered upon his work, Leroux wrote on ceaselessly.

An odd figure of a man was this popular novelist, with patchy and untid hair which lessened the otherwise striking contour of his brow. A neglected and unkempt figure in a baggy, neutral colored dressing gown—a figure more fitted to a garret than to this spacious, luxurious workroom.

The doorbell rang. Leroux, heedless of external matters pursued his work. But the doorbell rang again and continued to ring.

"Soames!" cried Leroux irritably. "Soames! Why the deuce don't you go to the door?"

Leroux stood up, dashing his pen upon the table.

"I shall have to sack that man!" he cried. "He takes too many liberties—stopping out until this hour of the night!"

He pulled open the study door, crossed the hallway and opened the door beyond.

In, out of the darkness—for the stair-lights had been extinguished—stepped a woman, a woman whose pale face exhibited, despite the ravages of sorrow or illness, signs of quite unusual beauty. Her eyes were wide open and terror stricken, the pupils contracted almost to vanishing point. She wore a magnificent cloak of ermine fur wrapped tightly about her, and a Leroux opened the door she tottered just him into the lobby, glancing back over her shoulder.

With his upraised hands plunged pathetically into the mop of his hair, Leroux turned and stared at the intruder. She groped as if a darkness had descended, clutched at the sides of the study doorway and then, unsteadily entered and sank down upon the big Chesterfield in utter exhaustion.

"Close the door!" she cried hoarsely. "Close the door! He has followed me!"

The disturbed novelist, as a man in a dream, retraced his steps and closed the outer door of the flat. Then rubbing his chin more vigorously than ever and only dreading from this exercise to fumble in his disheveled hair he walked back into the study, whose Athenian calm had thus mysteriously been violated.

His visitor kept moistening her dry lips and swallowing emotionally.

"Madam," began Leroux nervously. He had a hazy impression that his visitor beneath her furs was most inadequately clothed, and, seeking confirmation of this, his gaze strayed downward to where one little slipper-foot peeped out from the civet furs.

Leroux suppressed a gasp. He had caught a glimpse of a bare ankle.

He crossed to his writing table and seated himself, glancing sideways at this living mystery. Suddenly she began in a voice tremulous and scarcely audible:

"Mr. Leroux, at a great—at a very great personal risk I have come to night. What I have to ask of you—entreat of you will—will!"

Two bare arms emerged from the fur, and she began clutching at her throat and bosom as though choking—dying.

Leroux leaped up and would have taken to her; but, forcing a ghastly smile,

she waved him away again. "It is all right," she muttered, swallowing noisily.

But frightful spasms of pain convulsed her, contorting her pale face.

"Some brandy?" cried Leroux anxiously.

"If you please," whispered the visitor. She dropped her arms and fell back upon the Chesterfield insensibly.

Leroux clutched at the corner of the writing table to steady himself and stood there looking at the deathly face. Under the most favorable circumstances he was no man of action.

"Dr. Cumberly!" he muttered. "I hope to heaven he is in!"

Without touching the recumbent form upon the Chesterfield, without seeking to learn, without daring to learn, if she lived or had died, Leroux the tempo of his life changed to a breathless gallop, rushed out of the study, across the entrance hall, and throwing wide the flat door, leaped up the stair to the flat above—that of his old friend, Dr. Cumberly.

Thirty seconds were wanted to complete the cycle of the day, when one of the listless hands thrown across the back of the Chesterfield opened and closed spasmodically. The fur at the bosom of the midnight visitor began rapidly to rise and fall.

Then, with a choking cry, the woman struggled upright. Her hair, hastily dressed, burst free of its bind-



She Began Clutching at Her Throat, as Though Dying.

ings and poured in gleaming cascade down about her shoulders.

Clutching with one hand at her cloak in order to keep it wrapped about her, and holding the other blindly before her, she rose, and with that same odd, groping movement, began to approach the writing table. The pupils of her eyes were mere pin points now. She shuddered convulsively, and her skin was drenched with perspiration. Her breath came in agonized gasps.

"God!—I am dying, and I cannot tell him!" she breathed.

Fervently, weakly, she took up a pen and upon a quarto page, already half filled with Leroux's small, neat, illegible writing, began to scrawl a message, bending down, one hand upon the table and with her whole body shaking.

Some three or four wavering lines she had written, when intimately, for the flat of Henry Leroux in Palace Mansions lay within sight of the clock face. Big Ben began to chime midnight.

The writer started back and dropped a great blot of ink upon the paper; then, realizing the cause of the disturbance, forced herself to continue her task.

The chime being completed: One! boomed the clock; two, three, four! "The light in the entrance hall went out."

Five! boomed Big Ben—six, seven! A hand of old ivory hue, a long, yellow, claw-like hand, with part of a snowy forearm, crept in from the black lobby through the study doorway and touched the electric switch.

Eleven! The study was plunged in darkness! Uttering a sob—a cry of agony and horror that came from her very soul—the woman stood upright and turned to face the door, clutched the sheet of paper in one right hand.

Through the leading panes of the window above the writing table swept a silver beam of moonlight. It poured steadily upon the fur clad figure swaying by the table, cutting through the darkness of the room like some huge scimitar, to end in a pallid pool about the woman's shadow on the center of the Persian carpet.

Coincident with her sobbing cry—Nine! boomed Big Ben; ten!

Two hands, with outstretched, crooked, clutching fingers, leaped from the darkness into the light of the moonbeam.

"God! Oh, God!" came a frenzied, rasping shriek—"Mr. King!"

Straight at the bare throat leaped the yellow hands, a gurgling cry rose, fell and died away.

Gently, noiselessly, the lady of the

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civet fur sank upon the carpet by the table. As she felt a dim black figure bent over her. The tearing of paper told of the noise being snatched from her frozen grip, but never for a moment did the face or the form of her assailant encroach upon the moonbeam.

Batlike, this second and terrible visitant avoided the light.

The deed had occupied so brief a time that but one note of the great bell had accompanied it.

Twelve rang out the final stroke from the clock tower. A low, eerie whistle, minor, rising in three irregular notes and falling in weird, unsteady cadence to silence again, came from somewhere outside the room.

Then darkness—stillness—with the moon a witness of one more ghastly crime.

Presently confused and intermingled voices from above proclaimed the return of Leroux with the doctor. They were talking in an excited key, the voice of Leroux especially sounding almost hysterical. They created such a disturbance that they attracted the attention of Mr. John Exel, M. P., occupant of the flat below, who at that very moment had returned from the house and was about to insert the key in the lock of his door. He looked up the stairway, but, all being in darkness, was unable to detect anything.

Therefore he called out:

"Is that you, Leroux? Is anything the matter?"

"Matter, Exel!" cried Leroux. "There's a devil of a business. For mercy's sake come up."

His curiosity greatly excited, Mr. Exel mounted the stairs, entering the lobby of Leroux's flat immediately behind the owner and Dr. Cumberly, who, like Leroux, was arrayed in a dressing gown, for he had been in bed when summoned by his friend.

"You are all in the dark here," muttered Dr. Cumberly, fumbling for the switch.

"Some one has turned the light out!" whispered Leroux nervously. "I left it on."

Dr. Cumberly pressed the switch, turning up the lobby light as Exel entered from the landing. Then Leroux, entering the study first of the three, switched on the light there also.

One glance he threw about the room, then started back like a man physically stricken.

"Cumberly!" he gasped. "Cumberly!" And he pointed to the furry heap by the writing table.

"You said she lay on the Chesterfield," muttered Cumberly. "I left her there."

(To Be Continued)

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